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Responding to GamerGate2

By Take This · March 11th, 2024 · Announcements, Expert Content, Support, Video Games

If you're reading this, you've probably been hearing about what's now being called "Gamergate2." It's the latest targeted harassment campaign within the game industry and it's aimed at Sweet Baby Inc, a Montreal-based narrative development studio. The campaign also has been impacting entities and games associated with Sweet Baby, journalists covering the issue, and others associated in various ways with the targets. You also may be at a loss to know how to talk about this issue, and what, if anything, you can do about it. That's where we come in.

Discord, Steam, and X have been the predominant platforms where the abuse and harassment has been taking place. In these spaces, lists of game studios, companies, and associated organizations are being circulated for targeting by members of the mob.

Large-scale harassment campaigns like this fuel – and are fueled by – political events. As political rhetoric heats up ahead of the US presidential election later this year, this kind of online activity is going to ramp up and it's important to understand that these phenomena are interrelated.

As scholars and journalists have noted, the targeted harassment, hate, and cultural norms that were at the heart of Gamergate in the mid 2010's never went away. People in game spaces, especially marginalized developers and content creators, face hate and harassment daily. In fact, research conducted by Take This has outlined an entire spectrum and typology of extremism and dark participation in games that is bigger than any one movement but underlies all of them. It can be scary or uncomfortable to think about, to talk about, and to understand. In overwhelming situations, it's not unusual to feel at a loss or to have thoughts of helplessness, *but there are things we can do to mitigate* the harm.

FOR EVERYONE: It's extremely important to speak out and step up for folks who are being harmed. This kind of support can take on many different forms. This could be an email or quick check-in with the people in your orbit who are targets of the harassment, or are close to those targets (family members, colleagues, and friends of those targeted also experience different types of harm in these situations). During organized harassment campaigns, people sometimes are forced to leave social

media and online activity for a time, and they often need help filtering messages, dealing with threats, and maintaining their mental well-being. People of marginalized identities often already have some of these tools in place out of historical necessity, but the volume of large campaigns like this can quickly become overwhelming. The still-relevant Games Hotline website hosts a Digital Safety Guide that can support people experiencing or at risk of experiencing targeted harassment.

FOR INDUSTRY LEADERS: You may be inclined to be quiet or cautious, but that's actually not helpful. As noted in our resource "Empowering the Game Industry," a major lesson learned from Gamergate was the importance of taking a loud, public stance. At the time, many studios were hesitant to address the hate and abuse from Gamergate in any meaningful way. The reasons varied, but usually this hesitation was born out of fear of losing profits or concern that taking a stance would attract the attention of the Gamergate mob.

> *"[The thinking went,] we want to protect our community from Gamergate. So by being silent, we will avoid inviting the pro Gamergate crowd to our forums [and] into our community."*

However, the failure to take a stand and clearly communicate with the community backfired.

> *"Without an explicit statement from the studio that toxic, misogynistic behavior was not welcome, the studio found that pro Gamergate individuals assumed the studio's game was a safe space for them to build community."*

In other words, failure to clearly and unequivocally denounce Gamergate and the harassment and abuse done in its name created a space for that hate and abuse to flourish, spread, and become normalized.

Hate, harassment, and toxic behavior have no place in games. By taking direct, targeted action in a timely manner, we can mitigate further harm to talented, dedicated folks in games, and help prevent additional recurrences of these harmful events.

RESOURCES

- Games and Online Harassment Hotline
- How to Find a Therapist
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center – Online Harassment Resources
- Women's Media Center

RESEARCH

- Toxicity and the Bottom Line: The Impact of Hate and Harassment on Player Retention and In-Game Purchases
- Empowering the Game Industry: Strategies for Addressing Hate, Harassment, and Extremism in Online Communities
- Harassment of Game Makers: Prevalence and Impact

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Take This is a mental health nonprofit decreasing stigma and increasing support for mental health in games.

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit mental health organization providing comprehensive resources and support that is tailored for the unique needs of the game development community and embraces the diverse cultures and issues of the game community. We combine clinical best practice with a love of all things gamer, providing a safe, accepting space for gamers and developers. We work in a spirit of partnership with other organizations addressing these issues among game enthusiasts, streamers, and creators.

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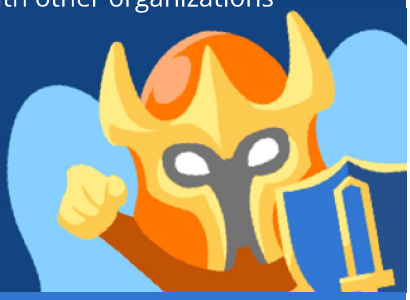

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